



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

REGULATIONS COVERING

Building Permit Exemptions

CITY OF SAN DIEGO DEVELOPMENT SERVICES
1222 FIRST AVENUE, MS 301, SAN DIEGO, CA 92101

CALL (619)446-5300 FOR APPOINTMENTS AND (619)446-5000 FOR INFORMATION

INFORMATION
BULLETIN

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This Information Bulletin describes the regulations covering construction work that is exempt from building, electrical, plumbing, mechanical or combination permits in the City of San Diego.

I. WHEN IS A PERMIT REQUIRED?

In the City of San Diego, if proposed construction work is not listed as exempt in the code amendment and supplements referenced above, it does require a permit. For clarification or additional information, visit the Development Services Center at 1222 First Avenue, or call (619) 446-5000.

II. BUILDING PERMIT EXEMPTIONS

This section also applies to combination permits (combination building, electrical, plumbing and mechanical permits issued for single family residences and duplexes).

Note 1: Even though construction work may not require a building permit, an electrical, plumbing or mechanical permit may be required. Consult Sections III, IV or V to determine exemptions for these permits.

Note 2: Even though construction work may not require a building permit, it is not exempt from Land Development Code or other public agency requirements, such as zoning regulations. Visit the Development Services Center, 1222 First Avenue, for zoning information at a specific site or call (619) 446-5000.

Note 3: If the site is designated as having historical resources ([per Section 143.0220 of the Land Development Code](#)), any construction work will require a building permit, although the work may be defined exempt later in this bulletin. This includes interior modification or repair/replacement of components parts, e.g. windows or roofing material.
[Section 129.0303 of the California Building Code](#), 2001 amendments advises a City of San Diego building permit will not be required for the following:

A. Small Accessory Buildings

One story detached accessory buildings used as tool and storage sheds, playhouses and similar uses are exempt, provided the roof area does not exceed 120 square feet.

Documents referenced in this Information Bulletin

- San Diego Municipal Code, ([SDMC](#))
- [Information Bulletin 203](#), "How to Obtain No-Plan Permits"
- [Information Bulletin 220](#), "How to Obtain a Permit for Retaining Walls/Fences"
- [Information Bulletin 240](#), "How to Obtain a Permit for Commercial Coaches"

B. Walls and Fences

Fences not over six feet high from grade on either side of the fence are exempt. However, they must comply with all zoning regulations. The masonry cap added to a masonry fence may exceed the six foot limit.

Retaining walls that are 3 feet in height or less, measured from the top of the footing to the top of the wall, are exempt from the City of San Diego building permit unless supporting a surcharge or impounding flammable liquids. See Information Bulletin 220, "How to Obtain a Permit for Retaining Walls/Fences," for further information. Even though a building permit is not required, all fences or retaining walls must be located completely on private property, including the footing. To determine where the public right-of-way ends and private property begins along a street or alley, visit Development Services Records at 1222 First Avenue or call (619) 446-5200, and request your curb-to-property line distance.

C. Pools, Spas and Water Tanks

Water tanks are exempt when not exceeding 5000 gallons in capacity, supported directly upon grade, and height to diameter ratio is less than or equal to two to one.

Prefabricated swimming pools and spas accessory to single family residences, duplexes or lodging houses are exempt when entirely above grade and not exceeding 5000 gallons capacity. Plumbing and electrical permits may be required.

D. Paving, Decks and Platforms

Platforms, walks and driveways not more than 30 inches above grade and not over any basement or story below are exempt.

Outside paving is exempt. *Note:* Any work in the public right-of-way may require an encroachment permit or public improvement permit. To determine where the public right-of-way ends and private property begins along a street or alley, visit Development Services Records at 1222 First Avenue, or call (619) 446-5200, and request your curb-to-property line distance. Driveway curb cuts always require a permit.

E. Patio Covers and Awnings

Patio cover structures are exempted from a building permit in certain residential zones provided they may not exceed 300 square feet of projected roof area; not encroach into any required yards or established setbacks; the property is not located in the Coastal Zone or on any site regulated by a Planned Residential Development (PRD) permit or Planned Infill Residential Development Permit (PIRD). *Note:* Carports are not considered patio covers.

Some awnings accessory to single family residences, duplexes, lodging houses, or agricultural buildings, are exempt from building permits. Awnings projecting horizontally out to 6 feet and attached to exterior walls are exempt. *Note:* Window awnings are limited to 54 inch projection.

F. Temporary Structures

Temporary motion picture, television and theater stage sets and scenery are exempt.

Construction trailers and offices for subdivision tracts, when not on a permanent foundation, do not require a building permit. Electrical or plumbing permits may be required.

A temporary shed, office or storage building and other structure incidental to and for work authorized by a valid grading or building permit. Such structures must be removed upon expiration of the permit or completion of work covered by the permit.

For further information on permitting requirements for trailers (commercial coaches), see Information Bulletin 240, "How to Obtain a Permit for Commercial Coaches."

G. Miscellaneous Accessory Structures

Antennas supported on a roof are exempt from a building permit. Antennas on grade, not over 30 feet in height when fully extended, are also exempt.

Flag poles and electrolier standards, not over 30 feet in height above finished grade, are exempt. Antennas may require a satellite antenna permit. There are very specific zoning requirements ([Land Development Code Section 141.0405](#)) for antennas. Visit the Development Services Center or call (619) 446-5000 for information.

H. Interior Remodeling

The following types of interior work are exempt from a building permit. If the work is being done in a commercial building and a change of use (per California Building Code definition) is planned, a building permit may still be necessary. If in doubt, call (619) 446-5400 for information.

1. Cases, counters and partitions not over 72 inches in height.
2. Painting, papering and similar finish or decorative work.
3. Installation of floor coverings.
4. Cabinet work.

I. Repairs and Replacements

Renewal of roof coverings on any building does not require a permit as long as there is not replacement of structural members such as roof sheathing. New roof coverings installed after March 1, 2004 must be Class A Roofing Assembly (§145.0202).

Repairs which involve only the replacement of component parts or existing work with similar materials and which do not aggregate over \$1,000 in valuation for labor and materials are exempt. *Note:* Such repairs must not include any addition, change or modification in construction, exit facilities or permanent fixtures or equipment.

Installing replacement windows in existing window openings where all of the following conditions apply:

- (A) The "replacement windows" are installed in a single family residence or a duplex.
- (B) The proposed window replacement shall not require any modifications to the weather resistive exterior wall envelope protecting the structure or the interior of the structure.
- (C) The existing windows to be replaced are not required to be fire resistive.
- (D) The proposed work shall not require modifications to the existing rough openings.
- (E) Exemption from a building permit shall not exempt compliance with the emergency escape requirements of Section 310.4 of the 2001 California Building Code and the provision of smoke detectors per the requirements of Section 310.9 of said code.

When permits are required for repair or replacement, plans may not be required. See Information Bulletin 203, "How to Obtain No-Plan Permits."

J. Hospital and School Buildings

Hospital and public school buildings under the jurisdiction of the State of California are exempt from City of San Diego building permits. However, plans including plumbing fixtures must be submitted for water and sewer plan review and fee payment.

III. ELECTRICAL PERMIT EXEMPTIONS

Unless specifically listed in these exemptions, all electrical work in the City of San Diego requires a permit. For clarification, consult the Land Development Code Section 129.0303 or call a City Electrical Engineer at (619) 446-5400.

No permit will be required for minor work such as replacing fuses, replacing or repairing switches, circuit breakers, lamp holders, ballasts or receptacles. *Note:* The replacement must be the same size and general type as the original equipment and the work must be done in accordance with the National Electrical Code.

No permit will be required for the replacement of lamps or the connection of portable appliances to suitable receptacles previously permanently installed.

No permit will be required for the installation, alteration, or repair of wiring, devices, appliances or equipment operating at 25 volts or less between conductors and not capable of supplying more than 50 watts of energy.

No permit will be required for installation made by a public service corporation acting as allowed in the California Electrical Code Article 90-2.

No permit will be required for the installation of remote control switching devices on privately owned appliances when such devices are installed by the San Diego Gas and Electric Company or their authorized agents as part of an energy conservation program. Such installations must be approved in writing by the City of San Diego.

IV. PLUMBING PERMIT EXEMPTIONS

Unless specifically listed in these exemptions, all plumbing work in the City of San Diego requires a permit. For clarification consult the Land Development Code Section 129.0303 or call a City Mechanical Engineer at (619) 446-5400.

No permit will be required for the stopping of leaks in drains, soil, waste, or vent pipe. *Note:* If it is necessary to replace any part of the pipe with new material a permit *will* be required.

No permit will be required for clearing stoppages, or the repair of leaks in soil, waste, or vent pipes, valves, fixtures, or replacement of exposed traps

in existing plumbing systems serving lavatories, sinks, laundry trays, and/or similar fixtures.

No permit will be required for the replacement of existing residential plumbing fixtures where no change in the plumbing configuration is required. Water heater replacement always requires a plumbing permit.

In case of emergency gas leak repair, it may be possible to perform the work and obtain the necessary permit the next working day. For information call (858) 492-5070.

V. HEATING, VENTILATION, AIR CONDITIONING, AND REFRIGERATION PERMIT EXEMPTIONS

Unless specifically listed in these exemptions, all heating, ventilation, air conditioning and refrigeration work in the City of San Diego requires a permit. For clarification consult the Land Development Code Section 129.0303 or call a City Mechanical Engineer at (619) 446-5400.

No permit will be required for the repair of heating, ventilation, air conditioning, or refrigeration equipment. *Note:* If the repair requires removal of the equipment from its installed position, or the replacement of faulty controls, valves, driers, or filters, a permit is required.

No permit will be required for the installation of temperature controls, repairing leaks, or recharging refrigeration compressors or systems. No permit will be required for the installation, servicing, or repair of ice machines.

No permit will be required for the installation of unit refrigeration system freezers and window-type air conditioners.

No permit will be required for the installation of any unit-system refrigerator or refrigerated drinking fountain.